

They sold a million

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

As young gamers back in the eighties and nineties, we knew which games were worthy of our pocket money because they received critical acclaim from reviewers, and the same titles would ride high in the charts week in, week out. What we weren't privy to were the sales volume figures from which these charts were compiled. For all we knew, Sensible Soccer could have climbed to the summit by selling merely 100 copies in a given week if the competition happened to have been sub-par; it was all relative.

In the UK, up until March 1996 (when Chart-Track took over the reins), the software, music and video charts were compiled by Gallup (and endorsed by ELSPA) through polling up to 150 of the most prolific high street retailers. They'd send a weekly form to the likes of John Menzies (who later became WH Smith), Woolworth's, Boots and a number of smaller CTN (Confectionery, Tobacco, and News) outlets, who would list the top 50 best sellers for the period along with the

sales figures, broken equally into budget and full price releases.



Some charts were supplied by independent retailers like MicroByte or HMV. This example is from CU Amiga.

Before the budget game phenomenon found its feet, the chart was a top 30 rather than two sets of 25. At this juncture, the decision was taken to split them because budget titles sold in much higher volumes, and over an extended period of time, thereby skewing the results. Budget games in the Speccy days could cost as little as £1.99 so could be considered an impulse buy you'd pick up when you nipped into the newsagents to grab the daily paper. It just wasn't a fair fight to pit one against the other when developers of full-price releases relied as heavily on the charts to nurture awareness of their catalogue of games.

The summary results of this raw data were distributed to the magazines who would publish them each month showing a rise or fall in rank since the previous line up. Though to drill down to the precise number of units sold you'd have to subscribe to the industry insider's publication, Computer Trade Weekly. Thousands of publishers, developers, retailers, distributors, critics and so on certainly did so, yet strangely the statistics remain thin on the ground today.

Instead, to determine how well a game sold we generally have to rely on information presented in interviews with the developers, either published in magazines at the time or retrospectively. These figures, of course, would be prone to inherent biases (pride, exaggeration etc.), or inaccuracies imbued by faulty memory or lack of access to the company's finances.

Part of the problem was, the people most likely to have a handle on the sales figures - back-room staff such as distribution and sales managers, accountants etc. - were the least likely to be profiled in magazines, or later online. Information might trickle down to the coders, artists and musicians, but it would often be vague hearsay. The 'suits' in the early days were reticent to even credit the developers for their craft, let alone invite them into the inner circle to share key performance indicators. Quite bizarre - even without the benefit of hindsight - given that they'd be more invested in establishing the fruits of their labour than anyone.

Another factor was the common separation between developers and publishers who would often operate as mutually dependent, yet entirely independent entities. The developers could deliver a game's code to the publisher and have little involvement from that point onwards. Sales results would be communicated between the upper echelons of each organisation, and treated as a closely guarded secret unless

you happened to have a million-seller on your hands. Then it would be a wasted PR opportunity if you *didn't* emblazon the fact across the box of the budget/compilation re-release, or boast about it in the promotional material for your subsequent games. Incidentally, the inherent claim vaunted by Ocean's 'They Sold a Million' series (there were three collections in all) was pure, unadulterated marketing spiel, to put it politely.

What we also have to keep in mind is that Amiga games sold in minuscule quantities compared to the major Japanese console franchises, so shouting the figures from the roof tops wouldn't be advisable. It would only project the message that the Amiga is an inferior gaming platform, and in the twilight years approaching Commodore's collapse, convince people to prematurely jump ship.

In 1996 some games were selling so poorly that, embarrassingly, the revenues wouldn't have even covered development costs. Ironically, they may still have entered the charts because so many leading developers had already switched their focus towards the PC or PlayStation so were no longer in the race.

Finally, for a while, the Gallup charts were sponsored by McVitie's, manufacturers of Penguin biscuits. This explains why Aquatic Games and RoboCod were in pole position for 97 weeks in a row, and were awarded the trophy for the 'Chocolatiest Games in the World'!

Nevertheless, with the advent of the Amiga's cult status, a number of sales figures *have* been coaxed out of their stones like the proverbially bashful blood. Below - in spreadsheet format - you'll find a selection of these in ascending order, along with any critical caveats and several entries from rival platforms for the sake of perspective.

So for the first time in the history of the known and unknown Megaverse we will discover which were the bestestest selling Amiga games of all time, ever-ever-ever... ever. *

* subject to available data (wriggle, weasel, wriggle etc.)



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